

Private sector in education

Institutional framework missing

THE private sector can indeed play an important role in promotion of basic education as has been evidenced on some scale by successful NGOs in this area. A much wider involvement of the private sector is needed given the huge number of students at the primary and secondary levels and the need for ensuring the quality of education across the board.

As a matter of fact, the private sector is contributing significantly to the development of human resources all over the world and the emphasis is on raising a force of highly skilled workers who can meet the challenges that the technology driven world of progress poses.

It is not possible for the government alone to run the basic education programmes successfully due to the limited wherewithal at its disposal. The inadequate infrastructures at the primary and the secondary level are obstructing the process of achieving the goals set by the planners.

The government should do the job of a catalyst and support the private sector education ventures through tax exemption and all such measures-- a point raised by a speaker at the round table on the role of private sector in basic education . The finance minister has said that the government would welcome private initiatives in basic education. However, community participation, especially at the management level, holds the key to a breakthrough in this sector. This can be done through a process of decentralisation and strengthening of local bodies. It is a sad truth that whatever little community participation we have seen so far has been blighted by politics. It is a snag that must be avoided.

For obvious reasons, the emphasis is on development of an institutional framework for the private sector to step in. This is one area where the government will have to create the ideal conditions for the private initiatives by helping the setting of a foundation especially for basic education. Such a foundation, jointly managed by government and private sector representatives, could be given a tax exempt status to encourage philanthropy. Such a foundation could also ensure private sector participation in school management, training of teachers, production of educational toys and relevant teaching materials, etc.

The ultimate responsibility of imparting basic education rests with the government. But private sector initiatives can lessen its burden.

Ahmadiyya mosque stormed, books seized

Government's ban order was wrong

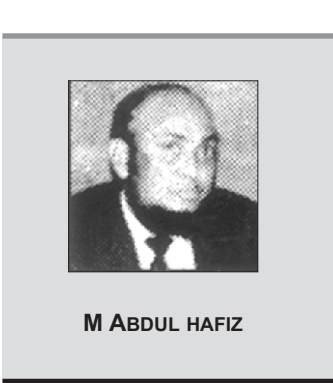
THE government's looking the other way about the extremist elements within the ruling coalition in January, when it banned all Ahmadiyya publications, has begun to bear its poisonous fruit. Last Friday, over 2000 anti-Ahmadiyya activists marched on the Ahmadiyya mosque in Nakhhalpara, and, threatening violence, intimidated the police into allowing the mob's leaders to enter the mosque and search for and seize publications that they deemed to fall under the government's January order.

Once again, the government has permitted anti-Ahmadiyya activists to use the threat of violence to advance their agenda of hatred. It is outrageous that the police would permit a mob threatening violence to dictate terms to it. But this is what the government has allowed the anti-Ahmadiyya activists to do since they commenced their agitation late last year. They have been permitted to assault policemen and intimidate and incite violence and hatred with impunity. And now they have been permitted to seize Ahmadiyya publications even though it is not their right.

The principal blame for this disgraceful occurrence lies with the government's decision to ban Ahmadiyya publications in January. At the time the ban was announced, all right thinking people criticised it for being an unconstitutional infringement on religious freedom and a shameful surrender to the forces of communalism, and warned that it would only further marginalise the already persecuted Ahmadiyya community and embolden religious bigots to step up their programme of persecution. In fact, all of this was obvious, even though the government chose not to see it.

Now we have concrete evidence of how the ban on Ahmadiyya publications is being used by religious extremists to whip up hatred of this tiny and defenseless community. It is bad enough that the government surrendered to communalism by promulgating an order that is clearly unconstitutional in the first place. After such a glaring abuse of the ban order it needs to be withdrawn and those who took the law into their own hands should be taken to task.

Going gets tougher for Bush



M ABDUL HAFIZ

WITH a hugely deficit budget the US' traditional world view since jettisoned, and multilateralism -- once fostered by his country -- itself trampled by him, President Bush couldn't but opt to run as a 'war president' for his reelection bid. The preemption war being his forte he took refuge in national security which he claimed to have safeguarded by making the US 'safer' than before. He ostensibly wanted to be likened to his great predecessors -- Roosevelt and Truman -- and incarnated himself as a crusader, redeemer and evangelist. By so doing he wanted to persuade his people to back him in the manner they did when he launched his war on terror soon after nine/eleven. But a cascade of embarrassing revelations and accusations made recently is inexorably demolishing those slickly packaged made-for-TV images of Bush as scourge of Islamic terrorists the world over.

The lies, half lies and deceits the Bush-Blair duo resorted to had since been contested by different quarters. Those contestations became all the more convincing

PERSPECTIVES

Pitted against a decorated war hero Bush's stance of being 'war president' is almost rendered unworkable only after the opening salvoes of accusations amidst total mess-up in Iraq. Even on half-forgotten Afghan front Bush faces embarrassment with the war's prime targets there -- bin Laden and Mullah Umar -- still remaining elusive. The louder the Bush administration proclaims that it is the only qualified protector of National Security the more hollow it rings in the ear of ones who know the truth.

when, for instance, former US President Jimmy Carter accused the incumbent President and Britain's Prime Minister Blair of waging a 'war of lies' against Iraq. They could not prove either the existence of Iraq's WMD or its connection with any terrorist outfit. As a result many among those who supported the war have now been driven to change their mind. A prominent case in point is former CIA analyst Kenneth Pollock who in 2002 wrote a book titled 'Threatening storm: The case for invading Iraq'. He conceded after the fall of Baghdad that the case for war with Iraq was "considerably weaker than I believed". Poland's President said he was deceived by Bush in sending troops to Iraq. Spain's newly elected Prime Minister Zapatero argued that one "cannot organise war with lies." He strongly holds that military intervention in Iraq was a "political mistake." Zapatero's views were amply vindicated when his Socialist Party won a landslide recently.

However, the bombshell exploded when respected former counter terrorism chief both under Clinton and Bush went public with most serious accusation yet made against Bush White House. He offered a telling account of White House's almost surreal fixation on Iraq in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. In his testimony before the commission investigating the September 11 attacks on the US he asserted that the Bush administration did not promote US National Security. It rather damaged the National Security by not doing enough to prevent 9/11 attacks.

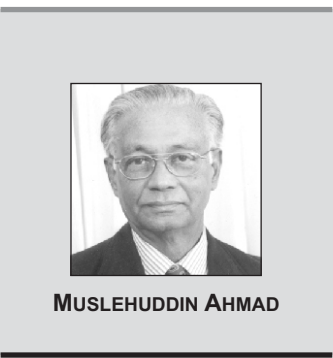
Indeed from the day one of his presidency Bush White House set its sight on Iraq. In fact, Mr Bush was so obsessed with going after

Saddam Hussein that he openly charged his counter-terrorism adviser to find a link between September 11 and Iraq barely a day after the attacks took place. Both in a recently published book and in a series of high profile television appearances Richard Clarke who witnessed as a principal actor in White House the apathy of CIA, Pentagon and FBI to terrorist threat of al-Qaeda, launched a blistering critique of President Bush's first eight months in office. Mr Bush, he charged, failed to take steps that might have stopped September 11, and then wasted American resources and lives on an unrelated and unnecessary war in Iraq.

As regard other important players of Bush team, Richard Clarke, himself a Republican, accused Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, a principal architect of Iraq war, of belittling al-Qaeda threat -- the unspoken assumption being Wolfowitz's eagerness to destroy a direct enemy of Israel than go after al-Qaeda. According to Clarke, Defence Secretary Rumsfeld's principal pre-occupation before 9/11 had been his passion for the US' Anti-Missile Defence. The Commission's report recorded that Rumsfeld "did not recall any particular counter-terrorism issue that engaged his attention before 9/11" whereas CIA claimed to have warned both Bush and Rumsfeld almost on daily basis of the impending terrorist attacks.

Clarke's revelations apparently offended Bush White House from where a viperous character assassin Condoleezza Rice, Bush's National Security adviser has led the White House's vicious attacks on Clarke. But too many people

Iraqis rise up against the Coalition



MUSLEHUDDIN AHMAD

BUSH Administration in collaboration with Blair government invaded Iraq a year ago on the assumption that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and had connection with Al-Qaeda which allegedly carried out the bombing of the World Trade Centre, NY. Reportedly, in the breakfast meeting with Prime Minister Blair in Camp David President Bush proposed attacking Iraq to get rid of Saddam Hussein. President Bush reportedly told Bob Woodward that he had already planned to attack Iraq and he made the plan two months after Afghanistan attack. Bush did not divulge this to Blair when he made the proposal. Probably he did not find it necessary either. It was the plan of the most powerful man on earth and he knew Blair would go by whatever he would say. Among other things including WMD, Bush said 'the guy wanted to kill my dad'. Apparently, Blair was not comfortable with the idea as he was not sure at that time, about the WMD's existence in Iraq, but he had to tentatively agree to support Bush because of Britain's special relationship with the US. Then the basis for the attack had to be created and that led to the manufacture of faulty and indeed wrong intelligence reports. The story is well known. National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice in her testimony to the 9/11 Commission talked about the "structural problems" in intelligence gathering and reporting which appears to be valid, but frequent visits by Vice President Dick Cheney to the CIA HQ and his alleged contributions towards some form of manipulation of such reports to build up a case for attacking Iraq did not come up.

Now the new facts are coming out through the intensive interrogations by the very competent bi-partisan 9/11 Commission and declassification of August 6 PDB. Bush administration appeared to have ignored the warnings of the CIA and FBI on possible hijackings by Al-Qaeda by saying that the warnings were not specific. Here also Bush administration may be given the benefit of doubt but it could not de

denied that Bush administration was predetermined and therefore more focused on Iraq than on Al-Qaeda attack. This appears to be for the reason that Bush administration was being pushed by Israel by its biased and indeed deliberate intelligence reports geared to immediate removal of Saddam. Similar reports were also provided by expatriate Iraqis who had fled Iraq and wanted the removal of Saddam so that they could go back and form a government. Their plan worked well as Saddam was

the Americans. But unfortunately this has spread over to the Shia group too as one of the Shia radical Muqtada Al-Sadr and his militia have now been fighting the Coalition forces. The American forces are now being attacked by both Shia and Sunni groups. American forces undoubtedly used very heavy handed methods in Fallujah and places around Baghdad. The available figures of Iraqi death because of American offensive appear to be around 600 and thousands injured. The media

SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

Let there be a UNSC resolution as proposed by Britain on "Central" role of the UN. The key factor is that the Coalition forces must withdraw within some agreed number of days and thereafter the UN peace keepers should start taking over. The peace keepers would, for obvious reasons, have to be drawn from the friendly Arab and Muslim countries. The announcement itself would calm down the Iraqi fighters...

removed and indeed some of them did go back and became members of the Iraqi Provisional authority. But all these happened at the peril of Americans themselves.

But as the situation stands today, not only the Americans, none is safe in Iraq. One may go to the extent of saying that the world stands upside down today in terms of terrorism; nobody is safe in this world. This seems to be the major contribution of President Bush in the world security system. One could see the bombings in Spain which indeed changed the regime there. The general view is that the regime change in Spain was the result of Al-Qaeda's action. The process may continue and bring regime changes elsewhere including the USA, Britain, Italy, Japan and all other countries which are involved with Bush's Coalition (the people tend to term it Bush's Coalition and not American Coalition as many Americans were against the war and Bush got approval of the Congress by providing 'false information' -- John Kerry already said that 'President misled the American people').

Today Bush Administration is in deep trouble in Iraq. During the 15 days of April, 73 American soldiers were killed in Iraq and the process started with the lynching of 4 American civilians, which was terribly ghastly and the world condemned such an ugly inhuman act. Sunni triangle and particularly Fallujah was the real trouble spot for

report said that Fallujah was turned into Jenin of Palestine (West Bank) because of heavy bombing and disproportionate use of force by the US troops, which of course the US command denied formally. During that time, an Apache helicopter was also downed by Iraqi fighters and two of the pilots were killed.

Apart from their fight on the ground and air, Iraqi fighters have already started taking hostages. Some 30 hostages of various nationalities including Americans, Chinese etc are already in the Iraqi hands. Luckily due to the intervention of some Sunni clerics Japanese, Russian and British hostages have been released. This hostage crisis has created turmoil in Japan and Japanese Prime Minister has lost a lot of political ground because of his support for President Bush. Russia has already withdrawn its people from Iraq.

Latest reports show that Americans were forced to go for a unilateral cease-fire as the situation went practically out of control. Now the American forces are reportedly asking for further build up and consequently asked for more troops let alone sending some back home. However, the cease-fire was still holding and negotiations have been going on between the Iraqi fighters including Al-Sadr militia group and the Provisional Council members for some sort of solution in the area. But the negotiations may fail any moment and fighting may erupt. Now the only danger is that if the

Do democracy and press freedom reduce corruption?

SHYAMAL CHOWDHURY

ARE democratic societies less corrupt than non-democratic societies? Does a free press play any role in combating corruption? The purpose of this writing is to explore these two questions briefly by examining the link among democracy, press freedom and corruption.

After the fall of communism and other forms of dictatorship, democracy now is the paramount form of political organisation. Similarly, and uncensored press, free from day to day government intervention, constitutes a pre-eminent component of a democratic society. A democratic government has political incentives to take timely action against corruption. The primary role of a free press comes from information dissemination; by spreading the state of corruption and misdeeds committed by public officials, bureaucrats and elected politicians, a free press can reduce the information asymmetries that otherwise prevail between voters and elected politicians. In addition, a free press can directly influence public policies by criticising public misdeeds and corruption.

In fact, a functioning democracy and an uncensored press can complement and reinforce each other in combating corruption. While an uncensored press can bring information about corruption to the forefront, a functioning democracy can create incentives for the voters to protest against corruption and for the gov-

ernment to act against corruption. Whether a government takes action against corruption depends on whether the citizens exert pressure by making use of their political rights - criticising, protesting and voting. However, in a functioning democracy with opposition parties, the government has immediate incentives to combat corruption. In contrast, in the absence of criticism from a free press and a pressure from the opposition, corruption can result from the political immunity enjoyed by government leaders in authoritarian countries.

There is a strong association between press freedom and corruption. Countries with a high level of press freedom generally have a low level of corruption. For instance, Switzerland with the highest level of press freedom enjoys one of the lowest level of corruption. As opposed to Switzerland, Angola with a very low level of press freedom has a very high level of corruption. Again, the position of Bangladesh is an exception. However, unlike democracy where Bangladesh ranks relatively high among poor countries, it ranks almost at the bottom in case of press freedom. Therefore, the very high level of corruption is not an unlikely outcome.

The simple associations suggest that political competition in a democratic society and a free press play an important role in reducing corruption. While a free press reduces imperfect information about policy outcomes and informs the voters, political com-

petition in a democratic society ensures that voters' preferences are reflected in policy.

Now the interesting question would be to put corruption against democracy and press freedom together. According to our theoretical reasoning discussed above, it was obvious that democracy and press freedom complement each other. Therefore, we need to go beyond the simple associations shown in two figures above. In fact, recent empirical literature that looks at this issue finds that this is the case. Countries with a high level of democracy and a high level of press freedom have a lower level of corruption compared to countries that have either one of those.

This finding has important policy implications. Development communities and donor agencies need to put more emphasis on democratic practices and on press freedom. Since promotion of democracy and press freedom can expose autocratic corrupt governments to scrutiny, autocratic regimes would not adopt such practices on their own. Therefore, donor communities and development agencies can add democracy and press freedom as aid and development assistance conditionally, which may force such regimes to reduce corruption.

Though democracy and press freedom are effective instruments to combat corruption, there may be a substantial time lag. As we see in the case of Bangladesh, despite the restoration of democratic process in the

American forces continue to kill the Al-Sadr militia members who are Shias, the entire Shia community may go for armed uprising. That would be too dangerous for the Coalition forces.

The Iraqis are not likely to stop fighting till the US led forces have left Iraq. The world and particularly the region would be better off if Bush Administration understands this before it is too late and decides to hand over Iraq completely to the UN. This will be the 'internationalisation of the Iraq problem' which John Kerry asked for. Half cooked proposals that UN representative Brahimi put forward may not work. The issue is occupation and the presence of occupying forces, which must end. The UN must take over. If the UN formally takes over, the issue of sovereignty will not pose any problem. It is necessary that the US and its Coalition forces get out of Iraq soon. This seems to be the intention of President Bush too as he remained firm on transferring power to Iraqi Governing Council on June 30. This is undoubtedly his election strategy and this is certainly the right decision. But this has to be done in an acceptable way. The only acceptable way should be the UN and not US handpicked Iraqi Governing Council. This Council represents none but themselves.

Let there be a UNSC resolution as proposed by Britain on "Central" role of the UN. This seems to be agreement in Bush- Blair's recent summit too. The key factor is that the Coalition forces must withdraw within some agreed number of days and thereafter the UN peace keepers should start taking over. The peace keepers would, for obvious reasons, have to be drawn from the friendly Arab and Muslim countries. The announcement itself would calm down the Iraqi fighters and the present crises would be nearly over. This would be good for both America and the region itself.

The take-over by the UN would indeed be in line with President Bush's own strategy. The only change required is the transfer of power to the UN instead of the Iraqi Provisional Council. Thereafter, let the UN work out its own plan for election in Iraq and handing over the power formally to the elected Iraqi government. And here the proposals of Brahimi would be useful. This certainly will install democracy which seems to be one of the goals of the US in the region, apart from its oil interest.

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early 90s, the country remains highly corrupt according to TI's corruption perception index. However, we have neither the counterfactuals nor the quantitative measures of the extent of corruption under the autocratic regimes that the country undergone during the late 70s and 80s. Therefore, whether a shift from autocracy to democracy with an accompanied increase in press freedom have resulted in a reduction in corruption is difficult to answer.

It is needless to say that democracy does not work 'as an automatic remedy' to all ills, as Sen (1999, p.155-156) warned. It rather creates an opportunity, but "with what strength such opportunities are seized depends on a variety of factors, including the vigour of multiparty politics..." Though our evidence suggests that democracy creates incentives for reducing the level of corruption, there are democratic countries with a high rate of corruption. For these countries, explanations need to go beyond tautologies such as 'interest groups that benefit from corruption are more powerful than the voters' and we need to find the sources of the power of such interest groups in democratic societies.

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OPINION

'State of disgrace'

HELAL UDDIN AHMED

THE article 'State of Disgrace' written by Aravind Adiga and published in the 12 April 2004 issue of Time Asia magazine is a one-sided story devoid of any journalistic ethics. The writer, a rank outsider having minimum of knowledge about the society and economy of Bangladesh, has written a lopsided story mostly quoting people who are opposed to and hostile to the democratic government of the day here and without bothering to cross-check his claims with concerned people in the government. Unfortunately, the opponents of the government, whose internationally reputed periodicals and electronic media including the Time Magazine and the Far Eastern Economic Review to spread canards and falsehoods against Bangladesh. Interestingly, like Bertil Lintner of the Far Eastern Economic Review, Aravind Adiga had also suppressed

his journalistic identity when he visited Bangladesh recently, as a delegate to a micro-credit conference. Any dispassionate reader would conclude after reading the story that it is a motivated piece designed to promote the agenda of the opposition cliques in the country.

It would appear from Aravind Adiga's story that the social, cultural and economic attributes of Bangladesh has undergone a sea-change within a space of two and half years' rule of the present government and prior to that Bangladesh was a paradise without blemish during the rule of the Awami League regime. But the picture would appear quite different if we look at the facts and figures related to crime in the country. Annual crime figures for the years 1999 to 2003 clearly indicate that the situation has gradually improved since 2001 with regard to criminal activities such as murders, mugging, robberies, theft, abductions and acts of terrorism. Official figures show, that the num-

ber of cases filed in police stations declined from 10,706 in 1999 to 8659 in 2003.

At the moment, the police in Bangladesh is manned by around 110 thousand personnel. But this number is quite inadequate for a country of 140 million. The police:people ratio in Bangladesh, which currently stands at 1:1350, is one of the lowest in Asia. The ratio is much higher even in neighbouring countries of South Asia. Add to this the resource constraints of the government, inadequate infrastructure, logistics and equipment, a colonial past of exploitations and subjugations, a traditional society with high rates of illiteracy, erosion of social morality, dependency syndrome emanating from the days of colonial rule and a past culture of law-breaking.

However, despite all these odds and handicaps, crime rate in Bangladesh is one of the lowest in South Asia. People should also not lose sight of the fact that, no terrorist

outfits presently exist in Bangladesh and there have been no communal riots or rise of religious fundamentalism. Besides, Bangladesh has also out-performed most of her neighbours in the field of social and human development in recent years and this has been lauded by no lesser authorities on the subject than the UNDP and the World Bank.

In the just released report titled 'Economic and Social Progress in Bangladesh', the World Bank has praised Bangladesh for the strides made in the past 20 years, saying that the country has established a track-record of progress on many 'social and economic indicators'. The WB compared the country's democratic progress with Turkey, saying that the South Asian nation demonstrated the feasibility of democracy in a Muslim-dominated country.

On economic growth, the WB report found that during the 1990s, GDP increased by 60 percent. Per capita income grew three times

faster than the average for low-income countries. Over the last three decades, per capita income grew more than twice as fast as the average for low-income countries.

The private sector has taken over former public sector activities such as distribution of fertiliser and irrigation equipment. It built and operated five plants generating 34 percent of Bangladesh's electric power under IPP contracts. On poverty and vulnerability reduction, the WB report said that during the 1990s, income poverty declined by 9 percentage points, a record exceeding that of most developing countries. Bangladesh is ahead of most countries in the region in reducing public food subsidies in the urban areas and redirecting most of the public food distribution to poorer groups in rural areas; an extensive food safety net exists in the country. Bangladesh is undergoing a demographic transition at a low income level without resorting to coercive measures, the WB report concluded. It is unfortu-

nate that Aravind Adiga has dismissed outright all these achievements by Bangladesh over the years with a single brush of his pen.

Despite media campaigns to the contrary by vested political and religion-based groups within and outside the country, Bangladesh has been described by credible people in Asia and the West who know the country well as a 'liberal democracy' and 'moderate Muslim country'. A Dhaka-based daily wrote in a commentary on 10 April 2004, "Time's correspondent has disgraced himself by describing Bangladesh in such extreme language. Bangladesh is no doubt facing difficulties but to call it a 'state of disgrace' should be a shame for any journalist with any objectivity or true assessment ..." Though the issues of corruption, law and order and economic mismanagement were highlighted, the conclusions were strangely far from it. They focused on Islamic fundamentalism, repression of minorities and religious

intolerance. What the Time correspondent did not report is how the party that killed democracy is now busy in trying to overthrow the elected government through any means. He also did say anything about the US Ambassador Mr. Thomas and the State Department coming out with a warning that change of government through unconstitutional means was not acceptable".

"The recent Time report is different from the first polemical ones and this time it could not hide the fact that the reporter came with an old brief to rewrite an old story... The reporter also interviewed a former President, who is angry with the government for being thrown out of the Presidency; Mr Chowdhury did not resign to protest anything done by the government. So the motive of the reporter is clear".

The reporter did not show any objectivity by not mentioning how difficult the task of running a democ-

racy in a developing country was when the major opposition party, felt free to create chaos in the country so that a democratic government fell. The Time magazine authorities should thoroughly examine the one-sided nature of the report.

Two years have elapsed since the publication of the cover story 'A Cocoon of Terror' by Bertil Lintner in the Far Eastern Economic Review. But by now, it has become crystal clear to the international community as well as knowledgeable quarters in the East and the West that his claims were 'cocoon of falsehoods' designed to destabilise a moderate democratic government in Bangladesh and to deceive the democracy-loving people all over world. We are quite convinced that by writing the story 'State of Disgrace', Aravind Adiga would in a similar fashion earn the reputation of being a 'disgrace for ethical journalism'.